

# Unifor Submission on Bill C-50: the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act

---

June 12, 2024



## Unifor Contact

Lana Payne  
National President  
[lane.payne@unifor.org](mailto:lane.payne@unifor.org)

115 Gordon Baker Road  
Toronto, ON  
M2H 0A8

## Submission on Bill C-50

On behalf of the 320,000 members of Unifor, who work in every sector of the economy, I want to congratulate the government for pushing ahead with the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* and working with the labour movement to implement key amendments. Unifor members have been calling on the government to adopt meaningful legislation that recognizes the critical role played by social dialogue and trade unions in helping to deliver the changes needed to secure a sustainable path to net-zero.

As the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology examines the current text of the bill, we urge the Senate to consider the points Unifor has raised in the past about the importance of linking transition to the imperatives of job preservation and to clarify the whole-of-government approach that will be critical to the success of Bill C-50. These changes will ensure that the legislation has its intended impact on fostering sustainable jobs while protecting the well-being of workers across Canada in an economy in transition.

### Support for Industry Decarbonization and Existing Jobs

Unifor has consistently underscored the fact that any vision for a net-zero future cannot simply focus on job generation but must simultaneously include a strategy for job preservation. The path that we chart to net-zero must involve measures that aim to preserve existing jobs in high-emitting sectors by transforming them into sustainable jobs. Rather than telling early- and mid-career workers that the only prospect they have is to prepare for an uncertain future in industries that have yet to be developed, the government must help existing employers reimagine their roles and retool operations for a decarbonized economy.

As we have stated before, the transition cannot and must not be an excuse for employers to contract-flip their workforces out of good-paying, union jobs into low-paying, precarious, non-union positions. Many Unifor members on the front lines are already seeing this process play out as employers invest in new, lower-carbon facilities that they deem to be out of scope of existing collective agreements. Workers will, quite rightly, view phrases such as just transition and sustainable job with skepticism if the only net-zero future on offer entails unemployment, economic uncertainty and precarity.

We are pleased to see that the current text of Bill C-50 has taken seriously our recommendations around defining a sustainable job as one that includes trade union representation and a collective agreement, as well as a fair income, job security, social protection and social dialogue. We also welcome the inclusion of the added principle that prioritizes the well-being of workers and support for the decarbonization of existing industries.

However, industry should only receive support for decarbonization if they can commit to minimizing job losses, creating pathways for skills adaptation and preserving existing jobs wherever possible – otherwise, employers will almost certainly exploit government

support to rid themselves of unionized workforces in the name of meeting emissions targets.

Unifor therefore continues to call on the government to add job preservation to the amended list of sustainable job principles, underscoring the fact that our vision for economic transition should not be restricted to transitioning out of existing jobs but must also include transforming existing roles and operations.

## Social Dialogue

We have also been consistent in highlighting the need for government to adopt social dialogue as the primary mechanism for stakeholder input into the policymaking process. As you are well aware, there are many countries around the world where no major piece of economic or labour market legislation is passed unless it has first received input and approval from the social partners, i.e., organized labour and employers' associations.

Outside of Quebec, Canada has had little experience with the practice of social dialogue and social partnership, but it is an indispensable component of making sure that workers' insights into best and worst practices are folded into concrete policy directions.

Again, I applaud the government for enshrining the principle of social dialogue in Bill C-50, and I urge the government to make social dialogue the foundation of how the federal government proceeds with any future legislative initiatives that have wide-ranging impacts on workers and the labour market. Unifor also welcomes the change specifying that the labour contingent of the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council should consist solely of trade union representatives, as is common practice within social dialogue and social partnership bodies around the globe and which formed one of our key recommendations.

## Ongoing Concerns

While the *Sustainable Jobs Act* may place Canada on firm footing for engaging in a worker-led process of delivering targeted measures and supports as the economy transforms, the principles contained in Bill C-50 and bodies such as the Partnership Council cannot take the place of concrete funding. On this front, we know that the federal government's existing commitments fall far short of the kind of funding that will be needed to ensure that both workers and industries can thrive in a decarbonized economy.

Likewise, social dialogue alone will not be able to deliver the kind of industrial strategy that is needed to build a coherent vision for how the interconnected industries of our highly integrated economy – including energy, forestry, mining, manufacturing and transportation – can transform in lockstep to support a net-zero future. With the support of the Partnership Council, the government should immediately launch an Industrial Strategy Table based around the principles of social dialogue to develop a set of interlocking sectoral policies that can be tailored to regional strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, Unifor remains concerned that a whole-of-government approach, which labour and the NDP have highlighted as key to the bill's success, has not been adopted in the most recent amendments, nor has the role of ESDC and the Minister of Employment and Workforce Development been clarified. In order for the Secretariat to succeed, the goal of developing sustainable jobs must be regarded as an overarching directive that spans across the entire government, and ESDC should be tasked with key responsibilities in meeting specific employment and training targets.

The passage of the *Sustainable Jobs Act* will constitute a historic victory for workers across the country. Unifor is committed to its success and we stand ready to contribute our support in any manner, including as a constructive member of the Partnership Council.

/klcope343